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PFIAB BRIEFING

Soviet Policy For Intercontinental Forces

In this briefing on Soviet policy and objectives concerning forces for intercontinental conflict, we will present a summary of the Intelligence Community's views as reflected in the draft for NIE 11-3/8-76. Our emphasis will be on the principal conclusions of the report we are preparing, but we will also comment briefly on our sources and methods.

We would like to note at the outset that the "A Team" does not have a single unified answer to the question of Soviet policy and objectives for intercontinental forces. While the Intelligence Community is in agreement on most aspects of this problem, there are divergent interpretations of the evidence in some instances. In today's briefing -- as in NIE itself -- we will present both a majority position and an alternative position on certain key issues.

The report we are preparing begins with a discussion of the various factors that might influence Soviet policy and objectives for intercontinental forces. This includes a consideration of such topics as:

-- the present utility of forces for intercontinental conflict

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- Soviet perceptions of the US and its forces
- Soviet attitudes toward detente and SALT
- Soviet military doctrine
- Soviet defense spending.

In addressing these issues we base our judgments on

- historical trends and observed patterns in force development
- what the Soviet say, both in public and in private
- our appreciation of the internal and external forces operating on the Soviets.

The Intelligence Community has examined a broad spectrum of classified and unclassified sources in its effort to understand Soviet thinking on strategic issues. While the body of evidence is considerable, however, it rarely provides definitive answers to specific questions about Soviet policy and objectives.

- Indirect evidence, both classified and unclassified, is abundant but subject to various interpretations. Soviet writings, for example, often reflect an individual author's perceptions of policy or a debate over what that policy should be.

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-- There is little direct evidence, in the form of actual policy directives or program plans, which would tell us how Soviet leaders describe in private their overall military and political goals. The information of this nature that we do sometimes obtain is fragmentary.

In presenting our judgments about Soviet objectives for intercontinental forces, therefore, we acknowledge that our understanding of this subject is far from complete. While the basic facts about Soviet programs and statements are rarely in dispute, the best interpretation of this evidence in terms of policies and objectives is not always clear. Such interpretations, moreover, are subject to the analyst's own perceptions -- of the Soviet Union as a nation, of international political relationships, of the uses of military power, and of the condition of his own country.

The basic position of the "A team" can be summarized as follows:

-- Soviet forces for intercontinental conflict have political as well as military value. The Soviets see these forces, along with their other military capabilities, as serving their long-term aim of achieving a dominant position over the West.

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-- Soviet writings on military doctrine -- classified as well as unclassified -- indicate that the Soviets are committed to the improvement of their capabilities for fighting and surviving a nuclear war. This reflects their belief that a nuclear war could be won, and that the ability to fight and win a nuclear war constitutes the best kind of deterrence.

-- Soviet doctrine has never accepted the concept of mutual assured destruction as a desirable or lasting basis for the strategic nuclear relationship between the US and the USSR. Although Soviet leaders apparently accept mutual deterrence as a present reality, they do not regard it as an immutable future condition. And they do not regard it as precluding major confrontations between the US and the USSR.

-- The Soviets achieved a position of rough strategic equivalence with the US in the early 1970s, yet they continue to press forward with broad and vigorous programs to improve their capabilities for intercontinental conflict.

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These programs have carried Soviet forces well beyond the requirements of deterrence as we would regard them.

-- Soviet attitudes toward detente and the SALT process provide for limited spheres of cooperation, but assume the continuation of a highly competitive relationship with the US. The Soviets foresee a vigorous qualitative strategic arms competition, in which they will strive to maintain and enhance their relative position.

-- We see no evidence that economic considerations would inhibit the Soviets from continuing the present pace and magnitude of their strategic programs or from undertaking increases deemed essential by the leadership.

After discussing these general considerations, the report we are preparing then turns to the more fundamental issue of the USSR's present objectives for its forces for intercontinental conflict.

-- In addressing this question we distinguish between ultimate goals based on pervasive ideological principal, and practical objectives which Soviet leaders may expect to achieve in some

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definite time period. It is a matter of interpretation and considerable uncertainty as to whether the two are becoming one.

In any case, however, the persistence and vigor of Soviet strategic programs raises the question of whether the Soviets now hold as an operative practical objective the achievement of clear strategic superiority over the US within the next decade.

-- In this context we would describe such superiority as a capability for intercontinental nuclear conflict so effective that the USSR could devastate the US while preventing the US from devastating the USSR.

We realize that deeply held ideological and doctrinal convictions cause Soviet leaders to hold as an ultimate goal the attainment of a dominant position over the West in terms of political, economic, social, and military strength.

-- We also know that the Soviet's belief in the eventual supremacy of their system is strong, and that they are convinced that their forces for intercontinental conflict contribute to their progress toward their ultimate goals.

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At the same time, however, the Soviets cannot be certain about future US behavior or about their own future capabilities relative to those of the US.

-- They have high respect for US technological and industrial strength, and they have seen it mobilized to great effect in the past.

-- While some trends in US policies over the past year or so probably fueled Soviet hopes that the US was weakening in its resolve, the Soviets are concerned about current US force modernization programs. They know that the US need not concede them superiority in strategic capabilities, and they may well see recent trends in US programs and policies as threatening to them.

Thus, the majority position in the "A Team" report concludes that Soviet leaders probably cannot set practical policy objectives in terms of some specific and immutable force posture to be attained in a predetermined period of time. Their programs almost certainly are framed and adjusted to hedge against unforeseen developments.

-- We do not believe that Soviet leaders presently count on a combination of actions by the USSR and lack of action by the US which would permit them

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to achieve clear strategic superiority in the next ten years.

Soviet expectations, however, evidently reach well beyond a capability for intercontinental conflict that merely continues to be sufficient to deter an all-out attack.

-- We believe that the Soviets probably are striving to achieve a war-fighting and war-survival posture which would leave the USSR in a better position than the US if war occurred.

-- In our view, the Soviets also want intercontinental forces which have visible and therefore politically useful advantages over the US. They probably hope that such forces will give them more latitude than they have had in the past for the vigorous pursuit of foreign policy objectives, and will discourage the US and others from using force or the threat of force to hinder Soviet actions.

In summary, the "A Team" report acknowledges the ultimate aspirations of Soviet ideology, but maintains that various other factors must also be considered in assessing practical Soviet objectives for the next decade. Soviet forces for intercontinental conflict are viewed as contributing toward ultimate Soviet goals, but the Soviets

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also respect US capabilities and cannot be certain of future US actions. Thus, while seeking forces that will improve their war-fighting capabilities and that may provide politically useful advantages over the US, the Soviets cannot base current force planning decisions on the expectation that they will achieve clear strategic superiority during the next ten years.

And that, gentlemen, represents the basic conclusions of the majority position in the report we are preparing. As noted previously, however, our report will also contain an alternative statement of Soviet policy and objectives.

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